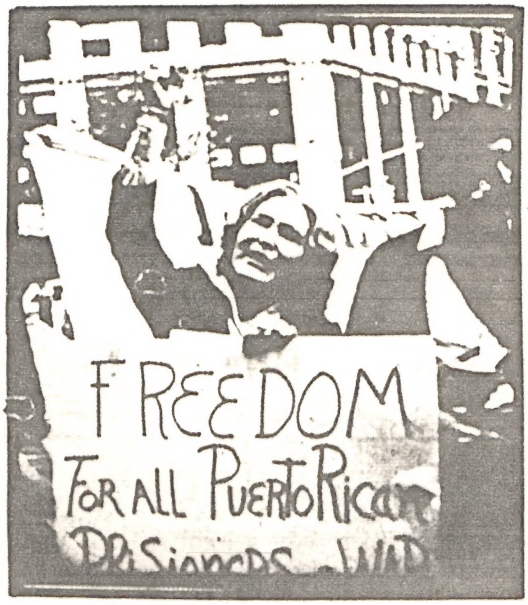
180 ?

My life I give for the freedom of my country. This is the cry of victory in our struggle for independence against the U.S., which for more than half a century invaded and has robbed our land that belongs to Puerto Rico.

Lolita Lebron
3-4-54
Message written prior to attack on Congress

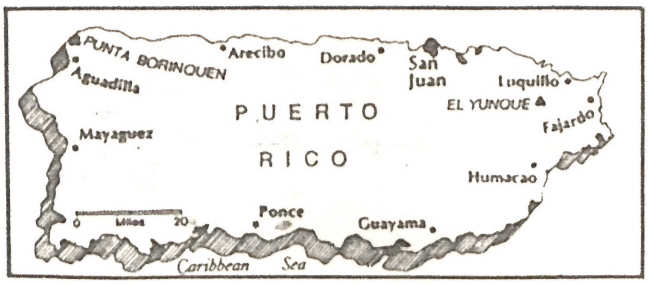


The Puerto Rican people are a nation of warriors. We have fought armed attacks against colonial rule since the Spanish conquest and continue to do so. This armed movement is the expression of a determined nation who seeks its independence from colonial domination...(this) is an unalienable right.

Dylcia Pagan
4-28-80
One of the 11 Puerto Rican POWs arrested and imprisoned

Puerto Rican Women Struggle For Independence

When Lolita Lebron wrote the above words, she was preparing to give her life for the freedom of her people. Like Lolita, the 11 Puerto Rican POWs currently imprisoned represent demands that Puerto Rico be a free and sovereign nation. What is the nature of U.S. domination of Puerto Rico? What has been the particular role of women in the resistance to this domination?



EFFECTS OF U.S. COLONIALISM ON WOMEN IN PUERTO RICO

Colonialism has brutalized Puerto Rican women and their families. With the threat of the growing Puerto Rican population beginning in the 1940's, women become specific targets of an ongoing genocidal program of sterilization because as Che Guevara said, "It is easier to kill a guerrilla in the womb than on the battlefield." Today, over 40 percent of Puerto Rican women of child-bearing age have been sterilized. U.S. manufacturers forced Puerto Rican women to serve as guinea pigs in the testing of birth control devices.

In addition to genocide the U.S. has dispersed one third of the Puerto Rican population to control the nation. By 1930, four U.S. corporations were controlling 60 percent of Puerto Rico's arable land. The U.S. invasion of 1898 destroyed the Puerto Rican economy. Puerto Rico, became, in effect, a U.S. sugar cane plantation. Women were forced into the work force to meet the high cost of U.S. imported goods. The U.S. introduced "Operation Bootstrap" which destroyed any agricultural economy and replaced it with high technology, low labor industry.

The destruction of the Puerto Rican economy has resulted in forced migration of hundreds of thousands of Puerto Ricans looking for work in the U.S. This massive dispersal has effected the Puerto Rican family. With an unofficial unemployment rate of 35 percent and with 81 percent of Puerto Rican families merely surviving on food stamps, the ability of the family itself to survive is threatened. Many families split up when members migrate to the U.S. in search of work. Those families that remain intact suffer the tensions, directed inward, that economic exploitation cause. The extended family is a source of strength in Puerto Rico and when it weakens, the ability of the nation to resist is also affected.

The process of cultural genocide is also felt within the family as children are forbidden to speak Spanish in the schools, and Puerto Rican traditions and culture are slowly displaced by the invading U.S. culture. All this contributes to a process of alienation between men and women, and between children and their parents.

CAUSES OF THIS OPPRESSION OF PUERTO RICAN WOMEN AND THEIR NATION

The Puerto Rican independentist woman believes that the root of her oppression is the colonizing power--the U.S. Since the invasion of 1898, the U.S. has systematically sought to control more and more aspects of Puerto Rican life in an effort to achieve complete domination of the nation.

In addition, the following facts explicitly describe the colonial domination of Puerto Rico:

--U.S. Military bases control 13% of the arable land on the island
--U.S. capital controls 13% of manufacturing in Puerto Rico
--The F.B.I., C.I.A. and U.S. military agencies all function in Puerto Rico where they train and direct colonial police agencies
--The U.S. Government and Congress monitor the functions of Puerto Rico's governor and legislature

Puerto Rico is not only a colony but a military-industrial complex controlled by the U.S. Historically, nations in the position of Puerto Rico have been forced to fight wars of liberation. Another example is Zimbabwe where women participated in a similar war and continue to struggle for their own liberation in the context of rebuilding their nation.

Independence and self-determination of a nation is an internationally recognized right. International Law explicitly states that colonized nations have the human right to fight for independence and soveriegnty.

The U.N. Committee on Decolonization recognizes Puerto Rico as a colony, although the U.S. Supreme Court refers to Puerto Rico as a "Commonwealth" of the U.S. In the face of this colonial reality, Puerto Rican women have always been active in the resistance.

HISTORICAL ROLE OF PUERTO RICAN WOMEN IN THEIR PEOPLE'S STRUGGLE

From the 16th century through 1898 when the colonial enemy of the Puerto Rican people changed from Spain to the U.S., Puerto Rican women have played a vital and integral role in the people's resistance to foreign domination. The names of women who fought in the forefront of this struggle comprise a lengthy and inspiring list.

Maria Mercedes Barbudo did not simply participate in, but courageously led, the first conspriacy to overthrow the Spanish rule. In 1950 Blanca Canales was sentenced to 17 years for her part in the Jayuya uprising. Four years later, Lolita Lebron led the storming of the U.S. House of Representatives. She declared: "I state forever that the U.S. is betraying the sacred principles of humanity in its continuing subjugation of my country, violating its rights to be a free nation and a free people." Lebron was arrested, jailed and recently granted clemency by President Carter after 25 years of incarceration in the U.S.

The international focus of our actions reiterates the fact that here exists a people in struggle for their independence, who will not stoop or yield to the violent and dehumanizing attacks of imperialism.

-Nydia Esther Cuevas Rivera

Arrested, July 3, 1978, after seizing the Chilean consulate in San Juan, Puerto Rico with Pablo Marcano Garcia. The two raised the demands of independence for Puerto Rico, an end to the celebration of U.S. independence day there, freedom for the four nationalists and an end to U.S. involvement in Chile.

NYDIA ESTHER CUEVAS

THE RESISTANCE CONTINUES TODAY

In April of 1980, 11 Puerto Ricans were taken prisoner as suspected members of a clandestine independence organization called the Armed Forces for National Liberation (FALN). Upon indictment and incarceration each of the five women and six men declared their status as captured prisoners of war and demanded withdrawal of U.S. navy troops from Vieques. In Vieques residents have been fighting to oust the U.S. Navy which controls 75 percent of their land. Many women, including Iliana Carrion, the leader of the National Committee for the Defense of Vieques, have been active in the struggle. The 11 Puerto Rican prisoners of war denounced the U.S. strategy of statehood for Puerto Rico and demanded independence and political sovereignty for their nation.

One of the women, Haydee Beltran Torres, was charged with involvement in an earlier bombing of the offices of a major oil company that has interests in Puerto Rico. She was transferred to New York City. In May, 1980, upon the evidence of a single fingerprint on a company application dated the same day as the bombing, an unknown jury sentenced Beltran Torres to life imprisonment. Another of the women, Alicia Rodriguez, was the first bound and gagged by Judge Bailey's sheriff's in Chicago on April 28, 1980. But the transcript of this proceeding reveals the courage and determination of the freedom fighters, as she continued to state her position and eventually worked her mouth free to proclaim: "I am here against my will. I am a prisoner of war." Immediately she was grabbed by the sheriffs and regagged.

THE ROLE AND PARTICULAR UNDERSTANDING OF WOMEN IN THE U.S.

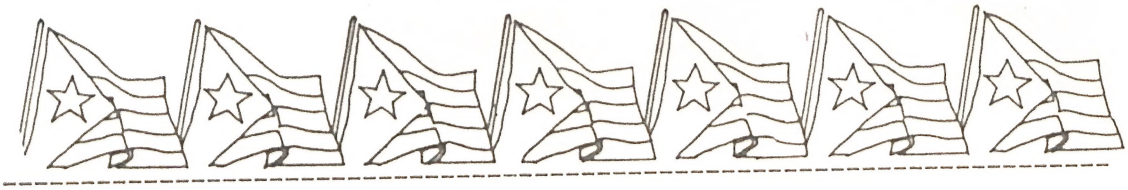
By our position within the U.S. the information we receive from our media and government concerning Puerto Rico must be understood within the context of our country's role as the colonial power. The media has portrayed the 11 freedom fighters as terrorists. Who knows better what real terror entails than the Puerto Rican woman who is forced to live amongst the poverty and racism, work in the sweat shops and struggle to merely survive in a raped and ravaged land. These people are not terrorists. They are courageous persons who are selflessly and completely dedicated to the insurance of the dignity and rights of all their people.

Drawing from their own experience helps women to understand oppression. This understanding can strengthen support for struggles of liberation such as the Puerto Rican struggle. U.S. imperialism does not support the true liberation of any women. The struggle for the liberation of women must also be a struggle against U.S. imperialism, which oppresses primarily third world women and men.

As North American women we can and must take a stance in support of the Puerto Rican people who are fighting for the human right of sovereignty for their nation. Similar to the crippling of U.S. aggression in Viet Nam, as a result of the anti-war movement, by taking a principled stand in solidarity with the Puerto Rican independence movement, we can have an impact on the liberation of the Puerto Rican woman through the liberation of her nation.

INDEPENDENCE & SOCIALISM FOR PUERTO RICO!

SUPPORT THE 11 PUERTO RICAN POWs!



_____PLEASE SEND ME MORE INFORMATION ON THE PUERTO RICAN INDEPENDENCE STRUGGLE AND THE CAMPAIGN TO FREE THE PUERTO RICAN PRISONERS OF WAR.

_____I AM INTERESTED IN ATTENDING A DISCUSSION OR STUDY GROUP ON PUERTO RICO.

_____ENCLOSED IS MY DONATION OF $_____ TO SUPPORT THE WORK.

NAME_____

MAILING ADDRESS_____

_____

Send To: WOMEN'S COMMITTEE IN SOLIDARITY WITH PUERTO RICAN INDEPENDENCE
Box 295, 2520 N. Lincoln Avenue, Chicago, IL 60614